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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: EU TROIKA VISIT HIGHLIGHTS DEFICIENCIES IN
TURKEY'S EU DRIVE

REF: A. ANKARA 1074

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1049

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Eric S. Edelman; reasons 1.4 b
and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a visit overshadowed by media images of police beating demonstrators in Istanbul (septel), the EU Troika visited Ankara March 6-7 to discuss the upcoming accession talks with Turkey. PM Erdogan and FM Gul insisted the GOT remains focused on EU-related reform. However, EU contacts said the Turks presented no program for further progress, and appeared to be suffering from "reform fatigue." Troika representatives praised past GOT reforms, urged further progress on the rights of non-Muslims, and advised the GOT to address the allegations of a "genocide" committed by the Ottomans against Armenians. Enlargement Commissioner Rehn said the EU cannot begin accession talks before the official start date in October, but can open some EU aquis chapters before the end of 2005. The Troika urged the GOT to move quickly to initial the Ankara Agreement extension protocol. Troika officials also advised GOT leaders to support the international consensus calling for a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon; Gul said the GOT is cooperating with Syria's Assad to promote reform, which he claimed Assad favors. End Summary.

Rehn Issues Subtle, Direct Warning

[1](#)2. (C) The EU Troika -- represented by Enlargement Commissioner Rehn, Luxembourgian FM Asselborn, and UK Minister for Europe MacShane -- met with PM Erdogan and FM Gul in Ankara March 6 and 7 to discuss Turkey's upcoming EU accession negotiations. The visit came in the wake of a public dispute over the lack of progress in Turkey's EU accession drive since the December 17 Summit (reftel A), for which each side has blamed the other. According to European and GOT contacts, Erdogan and Gul insisted in public and private that the GOT has not lost momentum in the EU reform process. Gul claimed EU accession will remain the GOT's top priority. However, a Danish diplomat told us MFA Spokesman Namik Tan admitted privately on the margins of the meetings that the GOT has lost focus since the Summit. A number of contacts from the European Commission and EU-member-state embassies said the GOT appears to be suffering from "reform fatigue." GOT representatives briefed the Troika on past reform legislation, but had very little to say about future plans. "There was no program for the coming year," said Martin Dawson, head of the Political Section at the European Commission Representation to Turkey. Dawson said Rehn expressed his disappointment in a direct but subtle manner. Rehn advised Erdogan and Gul to "look at Slovakia, Croatia, and Romania," three countries for which the EU postponed, or considered postponing, negotiations when political reforms stalled. Rehn also emphasized that all states, big and small, will be treated equally, a warning that the EU will not go easy on Turkey because it is large, Dawson said.

EU: Process Cannot Start Before October

[1](#)3. (U) The GOT pressed the Troika to speed up Turkey's accession schedule, by starting the screening process before the official opening of talks in October and setting earlier deadlines for two upcoming reports on Turkish accession. Rehn said the Commission cannot advance the schedule, but will expedite the process by opening negotiations on certain chapters of the EU aquis while simultaneously screening others. Rehn identified research and education as two chapters requiring little or no screening, and for which formal negotiations could be opened before the end of 2005.

Freedom for Non-Muslims Emphasized

[1](#)4. (U) The EU representatives praised the GOT for its

adoption of a new Penal Code and five other major new laws that will take effect in April. They called on the GOT to make more progress on the rights of non-Muslims, including by adopting new legislation enabling non-Muslim foundations to regain expropriated properties. They also encouraged further reforms limiting the political influence of the military. Neither side raised the issue of Erdogan's failure to date to name a lead EU negotiator.

Armenian "Genocide" To Be Reviewed

15. (C) MacShane pressed Erdogan, Gul and Deniz Baykal, chairman of the opposition Republican Peoples' Party (CHP), to support a serious examination by historians of the massacre of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire and the allegations that these massacres constituted a "genocide." MacShane advised the GOT to submit the issue to a UN forum, and agree in advance to accept the forum's conclusions. Gul said the GOT will consider the idea.

Syria's Assad "Good Guy Surrounded by Bad People"

16. (C) Troika officials urged the GOT to join the international consensus on Syrian occupation of Lebanon and press the Syrian regime to withdraw. MacShane stressed that Turkey is an important player in the region, and should use its newly strengthened relationship with Syria as a lever to encourage compliance with UNSCR 1559. GOT officials did not respond directly to the request, except to note the GOT's (weak) March 7 statement in support of UNSCR 1559. Gul, describing Assad as a "good guy surrounded by bad people," asserted that the Syrian leader wants to reform his country, but must proceed carefully. Gul said the GOT is cooperating with Assad to encourage reform.

Turks Urged to Initial Trade Protocol

17. (U) The Troika pressed the Turks to act sooner rather than later to initial the Ankara Agreement extension protocol, which would formally extend Turkey's Customs Union agreement to new EU member states (ref tel B), noting that it will take about three months for the EU to translate and ratify the document. However, the EU representatives did not set a specific deadline. Rehn averred that it will be easier for the EU to move forward with trade and aid programs aimed at the TRNC once Turkey initials the protocol. Recognizing that the GOT will issue a statement declaring that the protocol does not constitute Turkish recognition of the Republic of Cyprus (ROC), the Troika stressed that the declaration should be worded carefully to avoid provoking a diplomatic clash. MFA acting DDG Bilman is still confident the Turks and the EU will have no difficulty agreeing on the text of the protocol itself. The EU also urged the Turks to change the GOT policy of blocking EU-NATO cooperation because of Turkey's objections to ROC participation. As in the past, Gul insisted Turkey cannot make concessions in this area in the absence of EU progress in ending the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots.

MFA: Visit Successful, But Doubts Remain

18. (C) Several European contacts said the scenes of police beating International Women's Day demonstrators in Istanbul March 6 cast a dark shadow over the visit, made worse by the GOT's apparent lack of zeal for further reform. However, Ali Kemal Aydin, department head at the MFA Deputy Directorate General for EU Affairs, asserted that the visit was essentially a success. Despite the tensions over the Istanbul violence, the meetings allowed Erdogan and Gul to establish a "sound working relationship" with Rehn. Aydin said he was pleased to hear Rehn repeatedly refer to the EU and Turkey as "partners" in his public statements, which he hopes indicates a more open approach to Turkey on the part of the EU. But he said the GOT continues to believe the EU is less supportive of Turkey than past candidates. During the meetings, Turkish officials complained that Turkey is receiving far less in per capita EU assistance than fellow candidate state Croatia.

Comment

19. (C) This visit did get Turkey's EU candidacy back on track in a formal sense by enabling GOT leaders to establish contact with the new Enlargement Commissioner. It also served, however, to underscore not only the recent stagnation in Turkey's accession process, but the GOT's lack of

enthusiasm for further reform as well. Moreover, coverage of the Istanbul violence erased, for the time being at least, whatever improvements the GOT had made to Turkey's image through the reform process. As reported ref tel A, the EU is partly responsible for the recent lack of progress. But the GOT will have no one to blame if it fails to develop and carry out a program to further the reform process.

EDELMAN